

Interview with John Higgins, hospital corpsman assigned to Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. Present at the Battle of Hué. Interviewed by Jan K. Herman, Historian, Navy Medical Department, 10 June 2005.

Where are you from?

I'm from Lincoln, NE. I grew up and graduated from high school here. I joined the Navy in '66. Actually, I was still in high school when I joined. At that time they had a program where you joined and then went on active duty 120 days later. A buddy of mine and I joined together so we could go to boot camp together.

Did you go to Great Lakes?

San Diego. There was an airline strike at that time--August of '66. So they took us out by train. It was like 3 days and 2 nights on the train. I had never been on an airplane before and was looking forward to my first airline trip. It was kind of nasty--no showers or anything. The train was loaded with a bunch of guys going to Navy and Marine boot camp from all over the Midwest.

Why did you pick the Navy?

I knew that when I graduated from high school that I wasn't ready to go to college. My grades were good enough; I just wasn't ready to go. I knew my first semester in college I'd probably be a pretty good student. And I figured by the second semester, I'd be going to all the parties, whooping it up, and would end up being drafted. And I didn't want to be drafted and end up in Vietnam laying in the mud. So I joined the Navy and guess what?

You ended up in the mud.

Yes. But I can't complain. My training was excellent.

So you did boot camp at San Diego, and probably went to corps school there, also.

Right. I went to corps school at Balboa. They closed it down several years ago.

What do you remember about corps school?

Quite a bit. I was in Company 43 that year--'67. We had a helicopter LZ right behind our barracks. Each class got the chance to see what a Marine CH-46 helicopter was like, walk on and walk off.

I didn't have much money. At that time I was an E-2 and I was getting paid something like \$45 dollars every 2 weeks. That didn't last very long, even though I didn't have to pay for my meals or anything. So I spent a lot of time at the San Diego Zoo. If you were in uniform, you got in for free at that time. And it was very close--in Balboa Park. At that time you couldn't have civilian clothes on base so I had a locker at the Army-Navy YMCA down on Broadway. I rented it for a buck or two a month. I kept my civilian clothes there. When I got liberty, I went down there and changed into my civilian clothes then changed back into my uniform to get back on base. And you had to have a liberty card at that time. Many of my instructors were World War II veterans who served as corpsmen to the Marines.

Where did you go after corps school?

After 15 days leave, my company and my sister company went to Field Med School at Camp Del Mar at Pendleton. We went through with a bunch of dental technicians. It was kind

of interesting. Chief Lou Legarie was the chief in charge of the Field Med School when I got there. When I got to Vietnam, guess who was there?

We had Marine drill instructors to march us and move us around. But there were a bunch of medical people who had piss-poor attitudes. "What are you gonna do, send us to Vietnam?" At that point, I think we all knew that we were gonna go. So we really didn't have a great attitude.

When I went through corps school, which was 30 or 32 weeks, we had quite a bit of training. So in Field Med School we got more first aid training, some of the tactics the Marines used, classes on camouflage. To me it was an alien environment because the Marines don't have a lot of luxuries. Even the base smelled different. The Marines had these high, tight haircuts that we had to get because that's what the chief wanted. That's where I learned that women Marines are not "BAMs."

You didn't call one that to her face, did you?

I did and I got slapped.

I guess you didn't know that it meant broad-ass Marine."

No. I was just an ignorant kid from Nebraska. I grew up with the terms WAVE's and WAC's. I just thought that's what women Marines were called. The guys thought it was funny. From there I went to Chelsea Naval Hospital.

So you didn't go directly to Vietnam.

No. My orders to Field Med School came through with the final destination as Chelsea Naval Hospital. So I knew I was going to Chelsea after Field Med School. But it was just a matter of time. When I was in corps school, that's when I saw these corpsmen walking around in Marine uniforms with the naval rank on their sleeves. That's when I got to feeling like "Whoo."

And I actually joined the Navy to be a corpsman. I didn't realize until years later when I looked at my enlistment papers that I actually enlisted as a hospital apprentice.

Were you a ward corpsman at Chelsea?

Yes. Worked a ward there. There were two surgical wards there--a "clean" surgical ward and a "dirty" surgical ward. It depended upon the amount of infection the patient had. It was a policy of the military at that time to try to get the wounded from Vietnam as close to home in a military hospital as possible. We had guys from all over the New England area who were patients there. There were patients I talked to who told me about their service in Vietnam. It kind of gave me the feeling, "You get wounded, you come home. You're okay."

I was there for about 6 months. I got my orders to Vietnam in October of '67. I started getting my shots--the plague shot and all the other things. I got 30 days leave at home and was there for Thanksgiving. I went from there to Treasure Island. Boy, that was a dump. It was a transient barracks and transient barracks are terrible. You've got everything--the good, the bad, the ugly. I think I was there for about 3 days. Then they flew me from San Francisco down to Norton Air Force Base outside of Los Angeles. Our flight was delayed a day due to plane trouble. So they put us up in a motel. The next day we flew back north to San Francisco.

That makes perfect sense.

Yes. From there we took the northern route up to Anchorage. When the plane touched down it did a small skid. I thought, "Shit, I'm going to die before I even get to Nam." And from there we went straight to Okinawa. We were there for several days. I had another corpsman with me named Dennis Howe.

Oh, boy. I've been trying to find him. I have a famous photo taken of him treating a casualty at Hué. I have looked and looked and looked. Do you have any idea where he is?

The last time I had contact with Denny, he was driving a logging truck in Montana. I think that was back in the mid-'80s. I talked with him over the phone for a little bit and he seemed kind of distant. And that's the last contact I had with him.

Denny was in my sister company in corps school. We went to Field Med School together. We were at Chelsea together. We went to Vietnam together, and we came home together. I've got pictures of him in Vietnam.

As I understand it, you corpsmen were going to Vietnam, not as part of unit, but as replacements.

Right. We got processed at Camp Smedley Butler in Okinawa. Everybody got a GG (gamma globulin) shot. I spent 3 or 4 days in Okinawa. While watching TV there I saw a corpsman putting a dress on his leg. I turned to be his replacement. We were issued utilities and boots. My sea bag was put into storage. We then flew to Danang. By the way, have you met a veteran yet who flew in during the day? It was night when I got there. Everyone I have talked to told me that got there at night.

What did you see when you got there?

It was kind of a strange deal. Of course, it was late at night. When the plane stopped, an Air Force NCO got on the plane. It was a 707 from Continental Airlines. The NCO got up there and said, "Civilians and officers, you can exit now." Then the Army people got off. But it was mostly Marines and Navy. The stewardess standing at the door was crying.

Then we got off and it was hot and very humid. Off to the side and in the distance, I could see illumination flares going up and slowly drifting down, leaving trails in the sky. I was thinking, "When are the rockets gonna come?" Because that's all you heard in the news. Danang got rocketed.

Then we walked single file into and through an air terminal that was full of civilians. There were cages with chickens in them. There were ducks and other things. And the place just reeked. It smelled horrible. It smelled of animals and this stinky tobacco they used. It was pretty gross.

Out front of the terminal there were what the Marines called "cattle cars." These were trailers used as buses. There was a door that opened like a bus, but there were benches on the inside. They were pulled by a tractor. They took us to the processing center on a road that was full of pot holes.

The processing center or holding center was a pole building full of wooden picnic tables and there were guys stretched out all over the place. Some were going home. There were two great big signs at one end of it--instructions for those going to CONUS and those arriving from CONUS. I didn't know what CONUS was at the time.

I watched the fighter jets taking off from the adjacent runway. They were Phantoms taking off with their afterburners on and big flames coming out back. And that's where we spent the rest of the morning hours. I found a place outside to sit down. The guys going home didn't look real good. They were pretty grungy looking and didn't have anything to say to us. That's where I spent my first night.

The next morning, there was an incident. For some reason, there was a Marine with an M16 sitting alongside the building and he shot himself in the knee. I don't know whether it was deliberate or accidental. That was the first casualty Denny and I got to treat in Vietnam. We didn't have anything with us. We used the guy's belt for a tourniquet because he was bleeding pretty bad. An ambulance came down and took him away.

Did you actually witness the shooting?

We heard the bang, looked over and there he was holding his knee and spurting out blood pretty good. It looked like he had nicked an artery. Why he was around that processing center with an M16, I don't know.

A little later on, a chief from Division Headquarters came down and got Denny's and my records and asked us if we wanted to volunteer to go to Recon. Denny and I looked at each other and said "Nooo!" We had remembered the recon guys at Camp Del Mar running around with their shaved heads chanting "Over the hill, Over the hill, Around the Hill, Around the Hill, Recon, Recon." There was no way. He tried to convince us that we had a better chance with these guys but we didn't want any part of it.

Anyway, he left with our records, was gone for a couple of hours, then came back and told us we were both going out to 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines. And that the only way to get out there was by aircraft because it was in "Indian territory."

We hadn't eaten at this point, either.

You hadn't eaten since you were on the plane?

No. Nobody had given us any direction as to where we could go. So we asked the guys where we could get something to eat. We eventually got a lunch in a transient mess hall.

Danang had school buses that ran around the base for transportation. We got on one of those. It had a sign in one of the passenger windows that said, "Bob Hope Show." Right next to that sign was a bullet hole.

The Danang base was really a series of compounds all put together. Each one had its own gates with guards and bunkers made of sandbags. There were signs prohibiting the taking of pictures. Military trucks, jeeps, and three-wheeled civilian scooters jammed with people choked the road. There was no doubt we were in a war zone. By this point I was dazed and overwhelmed by the things I had seen.

We got to an air terminal with C-130s and C-123s, which looked like the Hercules but it only had two engines. We got manifested on a flight but it wasn't leaving for awhile. So we hung around the outside of one of the buildings and began talking with one of the Marines who had been in-country for awhile. There were some civilians and a mama-san with a broom and dustpan walking around sweeping. The Marine was telling us war stories because we were the new guys.

"Do you know how these people take a leak? Well I'll show you."

He then called that woman over to where we were. He told her to show us. She lifted a pant leg and squatted right there. He thought that was just the greatest thing in the world. Denny and I just looked at each other. What is this?

The other thing I remember about that place was the smell. It was a mixture of aviation gas, diesel fumes from all the trucks, and that stuff the Vietnamese cooked with.

It may have been that fermented fish sauce they cook with--Nuoc mam.

All those smells were mixed together and were hitting my nose.

We boarded the plane and taxied past fighters parked in stalls made of steel and sandbags. As we took off I saw another plane landing on a parallel runway. I looked out the window and saw rice paddies below and all these perfectly round craters from all the bombs and artillery.

We landed at An Hoa, which had a metal runway. It wasn't that long a runway. Those metal mats really made a racket, and combined with the engines reversing, the flaps and the brakes, it was a hell of a racket. We stopped at the end of the runway turned around and opened the ramp. And then I heard, "Boom! Boom! Boom!" I thought we were under attack but what it turned out to be was an artillery battery at the end of the runway firing 105s and 155s. At that point, I didn't know the difference between incoming and outgoing.

We filed off the airplane and as soon as I stepped off the metal matting, I was in mud that covered my ankles. It was the red mud of An Hoa. That was my welcome.

We reported to the H&S company. There were hardback hooches along one side of the runway and a road with a couple of hard back hooches on it, but it was mostly GP medium tents and signs out front indicating who they were.

We reported in and the guy sent us to the battalion aid station. But first he had to regale us with how they had been mortared the night before.

When I got to the battalion aid station, I saw Chief Lou [Legarie] standing there. And I remember thinking, "Oh, no. I'm done now. This guy's hard core." But he was really good. He welcomed us, told us that most of us would probably earn a Purple Heart. I think I stayed at the BAS for a day or two. Some of the corpsmen there gave us some helping suggestions.

We were then assigned to our companies. I went to Golf and Denny went to Hotel. Then I didn't see him for quite a while.

What month was this?

I got to Vietnam about the 19th or 20th of December. The first operation I went on was Auburn. When they assigned me to Golf Company, they were out on an operation and not in the fire base. So I just hung around the company area for a day or so until they returned. I stood outside the hooches at night and watched flares and the artillery exploding off in the distance. I said something about that in letters I sent home. In fact, my mother saved all my letters. And the ones she wrote me, she typed and kept all the carbon copies. I still have all those letters.

By the time the company came in, I had already been issued all my equipment--my jungle fatigues, web gear, a .45. The battalion aid station gave me a Unit 1. The corpsman in the aid station at that time told me to get rid of that as soon as I could. I was advised to use the pouches that C-4 explosive came in because you could carry more stuff in that than you could in a Unit 1. After my first operation, that's what I did. I got rid of that Unit one and used two of the C-4 pouches instead. I carried them criss-crossed on me, left and right.

My first operation was Auburn, which went from 28-30 December. I had some night casualties. Of course, it was dark and I couldn't turn on a flashlight. And I had a hard time finding what I needed in my bag. I was just fumbling around trying to find what I wanted. After that, I tried to keep all my battle dressings on my right side. My morphine, ace wraps, and other things I carried in my left one. To know which one was which, I put safety pins on the strap. If I reached down and felt safety pins, I knew that was the bag that had my battle dressings and so forth. In the other bag I carried other stuff like Bacitracin, iodine, etc. On my left side I had a grenade carrier, a three-pouch bag in which I put my serum albumin. I carried three cans of that and they fit just perfectly.

When the company came in, the Marines were pretty crusty. And coming in from an operation, they were dirty, muddy, and were in a mood like, "Leave me alone; don't even talk to me. Who are you?"

I met up with another corpsman, Terry Sutton, and found out that he was also from Nebraska. He introduced me around to people and that's when I got assigned to the 3rd Platoon. The senior corpsman was the one who told us what platoon to go with but we did move from platoon to platoon. His name was HM2 James Yount. He got hit in Hué. And Terry died in Hué City.

I spent a couple of days in the compound with these guys watching movies and drinking beer with them. There was an outdoor theater with a big plywood screen painted white. They showed us the old TV program "Combat," with Vic Morrow. Vic Morrow was taking his Thompson submachine gun around a corner, holding it steady, and just blasting away. The Marines booed and threw rocks and beer cans at the screen. That left quite an impression.

There was a hardback hooch that served for a beer hall. We were rationed beer. I think our ration was two beers a day. There were no tables or chairs in the place. You walked in, picked up your ration of beer, opened it, and then went to sit down to drink it. Some guys would swap their soft drinks for other beer, for the guys who didn't drink.

Then we went on Auburn, my first operation.

What do you recall about that?

They helicoptered us out in CH-46 Sea Knights. We gathered alongside the runway and sat there on our packs. The helos came kicking up dust and smelling from aviation fuel. At this point, I don't recall being frightened yet. I do remember thinking how I'd react to my first casualty or being shot at. The squad leader took our names and turned them in. I now know they were making up manifests in case we crashed.

After we were loaded, they flew us out to a location. We were supposed to be a blocking force while the ARVN swept toward us. I recall getting off the helicopter. The ramp came down and when I came out from underneath the ramp, it was pretty loud and I couldn't hear anything. There was some kind of scrub brush.

Then the helicopter took off.. A sniper then started shooting at us. You'd hear the "Pop--Zing! Pop--Zing" Every time that happened, I'd do a duck-squat. And the Marines were looking at me laughing. "What are you doin', Doc?"

"They're shootin' at us"

"Ah, he won't hit anybody; he's too far away."

There was a black sergeant named Pool. He thought I was about the funniest thing he ever saw. He was laughing at me pretty good. And I started laughing at myself because the sniper was probably a half a mile away.

We formed up and swept through some bamboo. We got sniped at again. I went diving for cover and was the only one who did.

We got to what had, at one time, been a railroad bed. It was raised above the rest of the area. That was our night-time blocking position. Not much happened that night.

The next day the helicopters came and picked us up and moved us to another location. When we got there, we married up with some of the other Golf Company. About a half a mile in front of us they were having an air strike on a tree line. I watched the bombs and napalm going off thinking, "That's just like I saw on television."

After the air strike, we swept across the rice paddy into a high weed area where the night before a Marine patrol had been ambushed and contact was lost with them. We found them. There were 10 to 14 of them. They had walked into an ambush and each one had been shot through the head. All their gear had been stripped off them. One guy must have had a ring on his finger because they'd cut his finger off. The first man I saw had a bullet hole right in the middle of his forehead. His mouth was wide open and it looked like his face was locked in a scream.

That must have been a sobering sight for you.

Yeah, it was. It was like, "Holy shit; they really are killing Americans." That's when the whole thing became reality. This wasn't a war movie or a show on TV. It was the real thing.

I thought we were supposed to gather all the dogtags so we could identify them. As I was doing that, we began drawing some automatic weapons fire. That dispersed us. We left the bodies and I guess someone came behind us and policed the battlefield.

We moved on into a more sweeping action. That night we set up in a little village. We ran some patrols out of there. We were also attacked that night. It was my first night of laying on my back and watching green and white tracers zip over the top of me. And hearing explosions. I don't think they were mortar rounds. I think they were either satchel charges or grenades being thrown at us. I thought, for sure, I was gonna see human waves come in but it didn't happen.

We then did some more sweeping and set up that night. A night ambush went out through my area where I was at the perimeter. About 10 or 20 minutes later there was a big boom out where they went to, then rifle fire. They came back in yelling for a corpsman and I went. Their corpsman had been hit. These guys told me they were going out to their ambush site and a Chicom [grenade] landed in front of the doc and he reached down and picked it up to throw it back. And it went off. His right arm was gone just about at the elbow. I tried CPR. And that's where I learned that at night I couldn't find anything in my bag. It was too dark. But he was dead and probably killed instantly. I think they called him Rhino. That was his nickname. Talking with people since, nobody can remember his name. The guys who would remember were lost at Hué City.

That was actually the last night of phase I of "Operation Auburn." They wouldn't bring in a helicopter in to pick up his body. Bodies were low priority. The Marines had his body on a poncho and we carried him back to "Liberty Bridge," which was several miles, and they evacuated him out from there.

We spent the night at Liberty Bridge and went back to An Hoa. For several days after that, we went on patrols. The thing about the An Hoa territory was that it was booby trap heaven. We never ran a patrol where we didn't lose at least one person to a mine or booby trap.

About the first week of January, we were doing a patrol around An Hoa and a Marine stepped on a booby-trapped artillery round which blew him up in the air. I hadn't been in-country a month when this happened. I saw the explosion and I saw him go up in the air. I ran to him with another corpsman. Both legs were gone just above the knee. And both legs had rotated 180 degrees up so the femur bones on both legs were pointed at his armpits. He was still alive, which was absolutely amazing. He was a black man with pale blue eyes. He wasn't bleeding very much but my training said to put tourniquets on. So I put them on and gave him two syrettes of morphine. I figured this was a dead man and why should he go out in pain. The only thing he said to me was "I'm gonna miss my momma," then he said the Lord's Prayer. He was still alive when we put him on a helicopter. His name was Thomas Ward and according to Bill Rogers, he died at the hospital.

Do you remember when Tet started?

Oh, yeah. We had moved north somewhere around mid January of '68. We went from An Hoa to Phu Bai. I think we were told that the 1st and 3rd Marine Divisions were trading areas of operation and we were moving north to be closer to the DMZ. I'm not sure that's true, but that's what I heard.

We went up to Phu Bai, and from there I was with a squad of Marines that was guarding a bridge south of there. There was a bridge that had been blown and the engineers had built a wooden bridge in its place. There was a little village and a two-story reinforced concrete bunker that we used for our sleeping quarters. Not far from that was a civilian action platoon. We were there for a week to 10 days.

It was pretty easy duty. We then got word that they were moving us into Phu Bai to become a reactionary force. I remember this little kid we called "Johnny." He was maybe 10 years old. If you wanted a Coke, he'd get it for you. If you wanted anything, you told Johnny and he'd get it for you. One day he said to me, "You go away."

And I said, "Yeah, I'm going away."

He said, "No. No. You go to Hué."

Evidently, he must have known something was up. I really didn't think anything of it. I had no clue where Hué was. I don't think any of us knew where Hué was.

On the night of January 30th I remember talking about Tet. It was going to be like Christmas and everything else wrapped into one. About midnight some fire erupted on the Phu Bai perimeter, but it was mostly people shooting in the air. "Oh, they're celebrating Tet."

We got rocketed that night. We were staying in tents with the sides pulled up. As soon as the first rockets started hitting, I ran out between the two tents with all these tent lines coming down. And I didn't stumble. I managed to high step over all those things and run into a trench. I jumped in there and landed on somebody who started yelling, "Get off! Get off me!"

The next day, which was the 31st, they told us we were going to go help the Army. They had run into some heavy fire. We would go up, take an objective, and be back by night so we shouldn't even take our packs, just our fighting gear.

Finally they fed us a lunch of mashed potatoes with creamed turkey over the top. Then they put the 3rd Platoon--which I was with at this point--on trucks and we headed out of Phu Bai towards Hué City. Up till this time everything we heard was just scuttlebutt; we had no real information. We were told that a village had been hit real hard and we were going to go up and take care of the village. As we headed north, you could see this big column of black smoke going up in the air ahead of us. We figured it was a bunch of burning hooches or something.

As we proceeded up Highway 1, we went by some little villages alongside the road. There were tree limbs down and houses leveled. We all looked at each other and said, "There's really been a war here."

Then we stopped and picked up a CBS photographer. This guy had a movie camera with CBS on it. He was walking down Highway 1 all by himself. He had dark hair with a red beard. We stopped and picked him up.

As we got closer to Hué, the column of smoke got thicker and thicker. I can't tell you exactly what I was thinking at the time. Then we started to run into more buildings.

This was at the south end of Hué.

Yes. Right where Highway 1 goes into the city. We got to the [Phu Cam Canal]. It wasn't very wide, maybe 10 or 15 feet across. The trucks stopped with one across the bridge, one on the bridge, and one short of the canal. There was a market place in front of us. On the left side were two- and three-story buildings with an ARVN tank stuck in one with bodies hanging out of it. On the right side were awnings overhead, probably part of the market, and some regular buildings.

About that time, a burst of automatic fire opened up on us and everybody bailed out of the trucks and looked for cover. We returned fire. We left the trucks at that point and I don't know where they went from there. We got up and started walking down Highway 1 on the left side toward the tank that was crashed into the building. We were all kind of laughing and joking at the time doing the theme song from "Combat." None of us fully understood what we were in for. We were kicking doors and looking in. The tank had bullet holes in it--armor-piercing rounds had gone through it.

We came to an open area with some vehicles on the road that had been blown up. Now I know who it was--Alpha 1/1. But I didn't know at the time. They were off to one side with an Army armored personnel carrier. There was a wounded ARVN colonel there with an arm blown off and some facial damage. I stopped and treated him.

We proceeded through the open area and took some fire off to our left. I recall being in a ditch. Somebody took a picture of me in that ditch. I think it was a Marine photographer. This guy was moving down the ditch taking pictures.

After we got through that area, we entered the MACV [Military Assistance Command, Vietnam] compound. I think it was a three-story building on the main road--Highway 1. It had the usual bunker at its main gate. Inside the gate was an open compound. It looked to us like these guys had it pretty nice. I don't remember seeing any wounded there at the time but it was obvious where rockets had exploded and blown stuff out of the brick and there were holes in the ground. So you knew they'd been under attack.

It may have been about this time that we married up with some more of Golf Company. That's when they told us that we needed to cross the bridge over the Perfume River to the north part of the city and go into the Citadel. And you could see the Citadel over there, this big, impressive red brick structure with a moat. It looked medieval. We were supposed to go in there to an ARVN compound. But first we had to take the [Nguyen Hoang] Bridge and that was really nasty.

But before we went across the bridge, and while we were outside the MACV compound, two Navy boats came up the Perfume River. They were circling and shooting onto the Citadel side. And the NVA were shooting at them with either mortars or rockets. Geysers of water were coming up around them. We got a radio call that they had a wounded man on one of the boats.

They pulled into the shore on the right side and at the base of the bridge. I ran down there, got on the boat, and treated a third class petty officer. It looked like a piece of shrapnel had gotten him just above the pubic bone, just about where the bladder would be. He wasn't bleeding really hard but I wondered, "How do you put a bandage here?" The wound was right down there on the lower part of the body right above the pubic bone. My main concern was that he was probably bleeding inside. I gave him a little compression and a shot of morphine. Sitting here thinking about it, I don't think they took him off the boat. I think they took him to a ship offshore.

Was this some kind of landing craft?

It was a patrol boat, one of those PBRs. That was the only time I ever saw one there. They had radar and a hand-cranked M79 grenade launcher on the front. The crewmembers were all wearing black berets.

After I finished with treating the man, I returned to my outfit on the south side of the bridge. That bridge was bad news all the way. It had an arch to it--a crown in the middle--so when you first got on it, you just couldn't see the other end. Almost immediately, we started taking casualties big time.

Wasn't there some NVA manning a machine gun on the other side?

Yes. That was probably a position that the ARVNs had set up to guard the bridge but the NVA took it over. The bridge had steel beams that went up from the roadbed and also overhead beams. We had so many casualties that I couldn't treat them on the bridge. We were just grabbing the wounded and dragging them to the south end of the bridge where there were trucks that took them back to the MACV compound.

The Army had a quad .50 machine gun on the back of a deuce and a half truck or a 6 by, as the Marines called them. I was plastered up against a steel beam and could hear the rounds hitting that beam--Tink! Tink! Tink! Tink! It was a good thing I was a little skinny dude. I probably only weighed 125 pounds. And here I am hiding behind the girder. I saw M79 grenade rounds bouncing on the concrete right in front of me. They weren't exploding, just hitting and bouncing. All the while, that quad .50 was shooting ahead trying to get that bunker. They were almost directly in front of me so I could see the guy shooting when all of a sudden I saw his forehead explode. He was shot right in the forehead. As soon as he was hit, the driver of the truck backed it up all the way back across the bridge.

Shortly after that, I looked at where the bunker was just in time to see [Cpl. Lester] Tully jump on top of it and shoot inside. He charged that machine gun next, jumped on top of it, and threw a couple of grenades down inside, killing the NVA who were inside. He got a Silver Star for that. Once that happened, we were free to get off the bridge.

It was late afternoon by this time. I'm guessing it was 4 or 5 in the afternoon. The north end of the bridge ended in a T. Some of the guys left the bridge, then made a left [onto Tran Hung Dao Street]. I stopped just past the bridge where I found a Marine with a sucking chest wound. As I was treating him, there was a hellacious fight going on around me as I've been told, but I don't remember it. When I talk to guys today, like Danny Cholewa, who was a machine gunner, he was right there with me and he talks about the fight in the alleyway, but I don't remember it at all.

I guess you were focused on your patient.

Evidently. This man was my very first sucking chest wound. The wound was on the left-hand side and I was thinking, "This is just like they showed me in corps school." He had this little round hole, and every time he tried to breathe in, there was a sucking sound. Then it would bubble, bubble, bubble. There wasn't very much blood. I rolled him over and felt along his back for an exit wound but there wasn't any. I took out one of my C-ration cigarette packs, took the cellophane off that, put some Bacitracin ointment on it and stuck it right over the hole, then put a small battle dressing on top of that, wrapped it around him, and tied it as tight as I could. Then I rolled him over on his good side. A couple of Marines then ripped a door off a house, loaded him on the door, put him in the back of a 6 by, and then took him back across the bridge.

About that time, the guys who had started to go left down the street, were coming back towards me with wounded. And that's when I learned they had been ambushed on the road. And that's when "Doc" [HN Donald] Kirkham was killed.

So they started to come back with some of their wounded and we loaded them on trucks. To this day, I'm not really sure what happened but a 6 by exploded. Whether it was a grenade or a rocket, we don't know, but it killed a bunch of guys.

Did you see that happen?

Yes. I was going back to help get more guys who had been wounded in that street.

How close to the Citadel was this?

We were pretty close, maybe a block or so. We knew there wasn't any way we could hold the bridge that night. At that point, there weren't very many of us left! After I finished with the Marine with the sucking chest wound, a corpsman who was with me, a guy named Smith, kept telling me he had been hit by a .50 caliber. I kept looking at him and couldn't find anything. He said, "It hurts and I know he got me." He went back across the bridge and I never saw him again. He may have been hit and I just couldn't find the wound.

You took care of the sucking chest wound but you must have had a lot of other business, too.

Yes. I took care of gunshots to the abdomen. I saw some leg wounds that weren't really serious and some shrapnel wounds that didn't amount to much. But these guys weren't going to let me do much with them. They'd say, "Get away from me. I'm okay, Doc. Go treat my buddy over there."

The most serious one that I actually had time to treat was the guy with the sucking chest wound. A lot of the men I helped drag off the bridge had abdominal wounds or other wounds that were very severe but there was just no place to treat them without getting killed. We'd simply grab them by the back of their flak jackets and drag them back across the bridge. Then Terry Sutton, Yount, and I would run forward for more.

Did you encounter a lot of Marines who shrugged off their own wounds, refused treatment, and insisted that you treat their buddies?

Yes, I did. And the longer we got into Hué City, the more that attitude took place. Some of these guys had been together for quite a while. It was also because of the esprit de corps--the brotherhood of battle. I patched up guys and sent them back to the aid station only to have them come back to me. I'm thinking, "What's this guy coming back to me for? He should be on a

helicopter.” And they’d say, “I’m alright. They told me I could come back. I don’t wanna leave.”

We finally went back across the bridge to the south side. We didn’t go back to the MACV compound. The squad I was with sat on the steps outside of Hué University right across the street from the MACV compound. We could hear the NVA inside that building all night yelling to each other and talking.

There was a tank set up on the intersection there and every once in a while he’d turn on his infrared and a red beam would come out of it. He sat there with his motor idling most of the night. He never fired. On the northwest corner of the MACV compound was a tower with a machine gun in it. And they were firing on and off most of the night shooting at somebody.

We spent the night there. I was in a combination of exhaustion and shock because we had lost a lot of people that day. And there we were sitting exposed listening to the NVA in the building yelling and shouting and not knowing whether they would come out.

Did you get any sleep that night?

Not much. I think we were just too hyped up to sleep, particularly when we could hear the enemy so close. Actually, the first few days was pretty chaotic. I don’t think anyone really knew what they wanted to do. It was a do this, do that kind of thing.

In the morning we cleared the building then went back into the MACV compound and spent the night there. That may have been day two or three.

This kind of urban fighting was new to you guys. You had been used to jungle fighting and this was now totally alien. By the way, what day was this?

This was the second day. We didn’t have a clue as to what urban fighting was about. It was all new to us. Jungle and paddies were all we had seen up until that point. I also think the command was confused. They didn’t understand what was going on either. I think it was the third day when they sent us down this road. We went out of the MACV compound so we would have been going west. We then made a left and went down about a block. Then at the first road there and made a right. We started to go down a road to get to a building and retrieve some Americans--some Air Force personnel who were supposedly trapped there.

On the lefthand side of the road were one-story houses. Then we came to a church with a parking lot in the front. On our right was a concrete-plaster wall that was probably 7 or 8 feet high. We were walking next to that wall when the NVA ambushed us from across the street. It was like being on the wrong end of a firing squad. We were pinned up against that wall. There was a church directly across the street from the wall. And that’s where they were firing from.

There were some trees on the right side of the street right along the curb. Then there was the sidewalk and then the wall. There was a spot in the wall that went down and made a little 45 and then back again and then went down straight. There was a Black Marine in front of me named Howard. He went down. I was in that recess in the wall. I began yelling, “Howard. Howard. Where you hit?” And I was trying to drag him back and find where he was hit. But he turned shocky. When Black people go into shock, they turn gray. He was dead. And to this day, I don’t know where he was hit.

I was sitting in that little recess with rounds popping around me. There was another Marine down to my left behind a tree. I watched him get hit three times. The first time I saw him jerk and then roll a bit going forward. Then he jerked again and I saw him kind of flip. I

yelled at him to cross the street because by this time some of the Marines had gotten into a house right next to the church. So I was yelling at him to get into that house.

We ran to the house. It had two or three rounded steps that went up to a door on the corner of the building. I tried to kick that door in and there wasn't any way it was going to budge. This thing where people just kick a door in in the movies is just movies. I had adrenalin going through me big time and I couldn't get that door knocked down. I can still see pieces of concrete flying up around me.

So we ran around the house to another door. By that time, there were some Marines in the building. This guy I had seen get shot three times was there. He had been shot in the left wrist. It was a through-and-through and didn't get the bone. He took a hit on the left hand side of the shoulder on the back side that took a hunk of flesh out of the back of his shoulder. It took the skin and the fatty tissue. As he moved his shoulder, you could see the action of the muscle. And he took another round in the left hand side of his chest in his flak jacket that hit a small can of cleaning solvent. And it deflected the bullet just enough to go just underneath the skin. And I could see the round.

He was lucky.

One lucky guy. I wanted to start an IV on him, but when I reached down for my serum albumin, all three cans were drained. Rounds had blown holes through all of them. I don't know when that happened. It may have occurred against that wall. So I couldn't start an IV. I filled out a casualty tag and we evacuated him back.

I'm not sure how many guys we lost that day. If the NVA had lined us up against that wall and executed us, they couldn't have done a better job.

Did you find anyone in the house?

Yes. There was a Vietnamese doctor in there. I wanted to take him back to the MACV compound. It was he, his wife, and his family. I wanted to take him back because he was a doctor. I figured that with all the casualties we had, a doctor would sure be helpful. But they wouldn't let us bring him back. We had to leave him there.

When you say they, who was they?

We had radioed back to the MACV Compound asking permission to bring civilians in but they said we had to leave them. So we left him there and he was probably taken out and executed. These were probably the first live civilians we encountered in Hué.

What do you remember about this man?

He spoke English. That's how he told me he was a doctor.

And he seemed to be pretty concerned that he'd be left there?

Yes, he did. I remember looking around his office and all the labels on his medicines were in French. While we were looking around, he came out of a bunker in the house.

That must have been a pretty tense moment. You guys were looking for NVA and VC and this guy comes crawling out of a bunker.

Yes. I'm surprised he wasn't shot. The bunker was built in a room of the house. He came crawling out shouting, "Don't shoot! Don't shoot!"

At that point, we were so new to the city, that we really hadn't thought about searching room to room yet. Of course, we had just almost been massacred against a wall.

Now that your serum albumin is gone, how were you doing for other medical supplies?

I managed to get some battle dressings out of the MACV compound. I think it was on the 4th or 5th day they sent three trucks back to Phu Bai. They put a squad of Marines on them for protection and I went with them. There were sand bags in the backs of these 6 bys for protection. If I remember right, there were three trucks. The deal was this. If one of the trucks went down, we'd slow down enough to grab the people off the truck, and keep on going. Nothing was going to stop us.

We headed south out of the MACV compound back down Highway 1 towards Phu Bai. I lay on the bed of the 6 by with the Marines shooting out of it. They were throwing their magazines to me and I was reloading them and giving them back. And we shot our way out. Some of the guys later told me that the lead truck encountered an NVA in the middle of the road who was firing at the truck and they ran him over. I don't remember that. All I remember was all this horrendous firing out of the back of the trucks and me loading magazines for the Marines. The whole time they were yelling at me, "More, more, Doc."

Just outside of the Phu Bai base, we stopped and got out. There were holes all over the trucks. When we entered the base, I went to the battalion aid station and told them what was going on. I resupplied and got a new pair of pants because the ones I had on had the knees ripped out of them. I spent the night there. The next day we got in a convoy and heading back to Hué. This would have been the fourth day of the battle.

We didn't come back up Highway 1. We went out of Phu Bai and up to Hué City on a dirt road. We went through a bunch of Army guys who were walking along the side of the road. Then, just outside of Hué City, we rejoined Highway 1. We crossed the canal on the same bridge where we were stopped the first day. It had been damaged with holes in the middle, but we still crossed it. We got to the MACV compound.

A squad of Golf Company was still in the building. I looked out a window and I think that's when Hotel Company arrived at Hué City. That's where I saw Denny Howe for the first time in a while. I yelled at him and a machine gun opened up and I ducked back in.

So you crossed the canal . . .

Yes. I was back in the MACV compound. There was a squad of my 3rd Platoon there. I married up with them. They brought some casualties in later that afternoon and I helped treat those. One guy had a leg wound. He had caught some shrapnel in his right leg right above the knee. It had laid him open pretty good; I could see the femur. The dressing the corpsman had applied up at the front was pretty blood-soaked. I removed that and replaced it with an Ace wrap, stuffing it in that big opening and then wrapping it with a pressure dressing again to stop the bleeding, which it did.

That was the last sunny day we had. After that the weather turned very overcast, misty, and cold.

By this time there was an Army doctor in the MACV compound with some staff so they took care of most of the casualties. I actually found a picture in a book of me looking at a wounded guy. I could tell it was me--a long skinny guy.

What book was that?

It's about Tet.

While I was away, 3rd Platoon had taken the Hué University directly to the west of the MACV compound. That was the building we had spent the night in. We went from room to room. I remember going through a laboratory and seeing a bunch of binocular microscopes. One had a sticker on it that read "Compliments of Ohio State University." So there was a university here in the States that was providing Hué University with equipment.

After we married up again with 3rd Platoon, we began several days of clearing houses. We were moving more west and just a little bit south.

Was there opposition?

There was opposition in every house. My casualties at this point--if they were alive--were mostly shrapnel from B-40 rockets that had been shot at us. Some wounds were caused by pieces of concrete. Rounds would hit concrete and splatter. As a result, I got guys who had wounds in their faces.

How did you treat these kinds of wounds?

The ones caused by concrete fragments didn't bleed very bad. They were fairly close to the surface so they coagulated pretty quickly. I had one guy who had some dirt or concrete granules in his eyes. I tried to flush that out with the remaining can of serum albumin I had but that didn't work very well. So I just put a small battle dressing on it and sent him back to the MACV compound. He came back about an hour later.

I also had some gunshot wounds of the arms, legs, and abdomen. Generally, with those, there was very little external bleeding. I applied pressure dressings to those. The first few days when we were going house-to-house, a lot of NVA were down in the sewers and street drains and shooting at us from there so I saw a lot of low leg wounds--shots through the femur. Those were treated with pressure dressings and morphine. Leg wounds turned out to be really painful for some reason. I had been wondering why we were getting all these leg wounds. Some were shot through the ankle. I saw a through-and-through of the ankle and I'm sure the guy probably ended up losing his foot. It was a nasty wound that went just above the ankle bone. The foot was just kind of hanging there loose. I could tell the bone wasn't really attached to anything. I had some blow-up air splints with me and tried to put one on but I couldn't blow it up. I don't know whether it was that the heat had sealed the thing together or what, but I couldn't inflate it to save my life. So I used Ace wrap again. I loved Ace wrap and carried as many of them as I could get. I made a figure eight type of dressing over the ankle and then evacuated him.

Did you use those four-wheel-drive mules for evacuating your wounded?

No. We were using International Scouts. All over that city were International Scouts. Some of the guys had hot-wired them. We'd throw our casualties in the backs of those and then the drivers would haul-ass back to the MACV compound, usually taking a lot of sniper rounds while they were doing it. We were using those civilian cars about the first week we were there. They took the wounded in them and came back with ammunition for us.

That canal I told you about, went around to the west side of Hué City and dumped into the Perfume River on south side to the west. We were sweeping along the edge of that canal back towards Highway 1 and going through an alleyway. It was heavily brushed and overgrown. As the point man came out beside a house, a machine gun opened on him. He went down. I

went out there to get him and just before I got to the corner of the house, one of the Marines grabbed me by the back of my flak jacket and yanked me back. “You’re not going out there, Doc!” The platoon leader for the 3rd Platoon, Bill Rogers, who also pitched baseball for the University of Mississippi, began pitching grenades over the top of a one-story house trying to get that machine gun. All this time, we were pinned behind the house. We tried to flank the machine gunners but they could shoot down the little alleyways on both sides of the house. I could see that Marine lying out there. And he wasn’t moving. He wasn’t moving an inch.

Rogers must have had quite an arm.

He did. I’m still in contact with him. He lives in Earl, Arkansas. He’s a rice farmer. One of those grenades finally got the machine gun position and then one of the Marines ran out and started dragging the wounded man back. I then went out. He had been shot through both legs, breaking the femurs in each leg. And this man was in absolute, amazing pain. He had tears in his eyes but never made a whimper. I guess he had figured out that if he made a move they’d shoot him again. He must have lay out there for what seemed to me like an eternity. It may actually have been 5 minutes, perhaps 10 minutes tops. I gave him two shots of morphine because I was afraid he was going to go into shock. He wasn’t bleeding very bad, so I used pressure dressings. I had told the Marines to get me some wood and they came back with what appeared to be slats off a bed. They broke them up and I used them to splint his upper legs. We then rolled him onto a poncho and a couple of Marines took him out to the road where they loaded him on one of those Scouts and took him away.

We then continued down the road beside the canal. And, I’ll be damned, if an Army huey didn’t come flying down that canal and start shooting at us. The bullets kicked up dust all around me but it was a miracle that nobody was hit.

When we went forward, we’d take a house or a group of houses. And at night, we’d drop back maybe half a block to an intersection so there would be a road between us and the next group of houses. That gave us a better perimeter.

This went on for several days. At this point, I think Hotel Company was engaged in a battle to take the Treasury building. I don’t remember hearing firing from any other engagement. All I heard was the firing that we were directly involved with. That may have been because I was so concentrated on what we were doing.

We took some buildings and then part of the hospital compound. I remember seeing all these freshly used bloody bandages laying all over the place. Evidently the NVA was also using that hospital for their wounded. We were going through one of the wards and a rocket came through a window. It made our ears ring and some of the guys got powder burns and a little shrapnel, but nothing real serious. I had a lot of guys with small puncture wounds from shrapnel. I just wiped them off and applied a small pressure dressing. If the wound was on an extremity, I sometimes took a roll of gauze and wrapped it around a couple of times and tied it. Then I wrapped some adhesive tape around it.

I went through a leprosy ward. I thought, “What are these people?” Then I saw the lesions on their faces.

So this hospital was occupied by civilian patients and the NVA had used part of it for their wounded?

Yes. I think the NVA left those patients alone because it was a leprosy ward. After we went through the hospital, we took some more houses.

A day or so later, we took the prison. It had a big concrete wall about 20 feet tall with guard towers. They blew a hole through the wall with a recoilless rifle and we charged in. Just as we got through the hole, there was a compound within a compound right underneath one of the guard towers. Once we got through the wall, we clustered together because we didn't know what was past the wall. We had no maps. We heard a clank on the tin roof above us and it was a tear gas grenade. I reached for my gas mask and pulled so hard on it that the snaps on the canvas cover ripped right out with it.

Who threw the tear gas?

The NVA. Right above us was an NVA. The Marines went up and captured him and brought him down to me. He had a laceration on the top of his head. I took some merthiolate and poured it in the wound. That probably hurt like a sonofabitch. There was a Marine on each side of him holding him and he was just staring daggers at us. It turns out that he had several rifles and fragmentary grenades up there. Why he threw that CS is because he just didn't know what he had.

What did you do with him?

We took him back to our headquarters. We took the prison but all the prisoners were gone. After that, we took the yacht club. It was on the west side of the bridge. So you had Highway 1 going across the bridge. Then there was Le Loi street on the south side of the river. Between the street and the river was a fairly wide space about 50 yards wide and then the yacht club that had tennis courts and a swimming pool. We had a hell of a fight taking that.

One of the machine gunners got hit there. That was Larry Ortiz. If I remember correctly, it was a leg wound. That was pretty straightforward--a pressure dressing to control the bleeding and then evacuation. There wasn't any way he was coming back. But there were many guys who had through-and-through gunshot wounds. There was one I remember who had a through-and-through just behind the knee. He went back to the battalion aid station and they sent him back out to me. We were just running out of bodies.

As you were taking these building, how many guys would have been with you at that time?

It was a platoon operation. There were supposed to be three squads in each platoon. But we were down to two. So there'd be between 10-14 of us at a time. We'd fire on a building. An M79 guy would try to launch something inside a window. At some point someone got some 3.5 rocket launchers for us. We'd shoot those through the door but half of those turned out to be duds. They'd hit the door and just fall down without exploding. Then someone would pitch a grenade in and rush through going from room to room. If someone went down, I'd be right there with them.

Once or twice, I had a guy shot right through the wall. One guy got a burst of fire through the wall and I ended up treating another sucking chest wound that way. By this time I was pretty numb about the casualties. It was just a routine thing. This is how you do it, that kind of thing. You did it without thinking about what you were doing. A lot of the casualties just ran together.

I always treated the sucking chest wounds the same way. The battle dressings came in a clear plastic bag and I could use that to stick over the hole.

The first sucking chest wound you treated on the other side of the bridge, you said you used the cellophane from a cigarette pack

Yes. I used cellophane on that wound. That first time, I had recalled all the things they had taught us in school about how to treat sucking chest wounds. And all that came back to me. But by this time, it was a matter of using expedient dressing. Whatever you could do to stem the bleeding and keep the guy going. A piece of plastic across there worked.

I remember another incident. A Marine was running into a house and an explosion took place to one side of him. When I jumped on him, I couldn't find any bleeding but he couldn't breathe. All I found were some little specks on the side of his face and his arms but nothing on his upper torso. I rolled him over but still couldn't find anything. He was saying, "I can't breathe. I can't breathe." Then he was starting to get a little blue around the lips. I felt the side of his chest and there was a grinding feeling. The force of the explosion probably fractured his ribs and he couldn't get a breath.

I took an 18 gauge needle and stuck it into his chest and--pht. Air escaped and it made him feel better. There must have been air trapped in his lungs and he couldn't get it out. He was breathing better after I did that. It may not be by the book but you do what you can.

When we went down Le Loi Street, our radio operator, Benny Davis, had a B-40 rocket explode behind him and just covered his buttocks and the backs of his legs with shrapnel. It was like someone hit him with a shotgun. How do you dress wounds to both buttocks? It was a tough question. And he's yelling, "I'm on fire! I'm on fire!" That shrapnel and gunpowder burned.

I used two large battle dressings and some Bacitracin ointment and that helped stop the bleeding. And Benny stayed with us. I sent him back to the battalion aid station, they put a stitch or two in a couple of his wounds, gave him a new pair of pants, and sent him back to me.

Where was the battalion aid station at this point?

I think it was in the MACV compound or very near it.

So you weren't that far from the compound?

If you went west from the MACV compound, the city only went four more blocks before it started getting rural. And the same way back to the south. There were buildings to the east but it wasn't densely populated. No. We're never a huge distance from the MACV compound.

What day was this?

This had to be the 10th or 12th day. We took a high rise apartment complex maybe four or five stories tall. We actually found an American woman there. She told us that the night of the 30th, the NVA marched in formation past their apartment complex. They had just been sitting in their apartments waiting to see what would happen.

Then we swept down Highway 1 down towards Phu Bai. We had to go up a long driveway and took a chateau about a block and a half west of Highway 1. Nobody was there and the building was untouched. Then we took part of what I was told was a girl's school. Then we went back up Highway 1 towards the MACV compound. There's a traffic circle on Highway 1 and just north of it was an open area about two or three blocks long.

We were standing inside a building and Bill Rogers, our platoon lieutenant was looking out of a window at that traffic circle to see what was across the road. And he was hit by a burst of AK. He got two rounds in the abdomen and another in the upper right groin. While I was

treating him, I wondered why he was standing in front of the window. The platoon sergeant said there was a sniper across the street. He wasn't bleeding very much but was in quite a bit of pain.

I gave him some morphine and put pressure dressings on the abdominal wounds. Somebody showed a regular canvas hardback stretcher and we put him on that. We had to lift him over a wall about 4 feet tall. The top of it was impregnated with pieces of broken glass and we dropped him on it. It was an awkward lift. Fortunately, he didn't receive any more damage. And then we evacuated him and that's the last I saw of him.

We then continued back down that road heading north back toward the MACV compound. They wanted us to sweep back up Highway 1 because vehicles that were coming into Hué were still catching sniper fire on that part of the road. And they wanted us to clear it out. There was a house with a cupola on top of it. We went up there to get a good view and just as we were coming down, a B-40 rocket hit where we just had been. One of my Marines caught a pretty big piece of shrapnel in the back of his neck. It was actually sticking out and it looked like it was imbedded in his spinal cord of his backbone. So I was afraid to pull it out. I took two dressings and put one on each side of it to keep it from oozing any more blood but also not putting any direct pressure on top of it. What else could I do? I couldn't tie it tight; I'd choke the guy.

There was a fight a day or so after that when we were heading out of the MACV compound and going down towards the canal again. We went back south about three blocks and headed west again when we got involved in a hellacious firefight. A mechanical mule came down with a recoilless rifle on it. These guys would run out there, fire a .50 caliber spotter round, then run back towards us. Then they'd run back out there. When one guy went out there to fire it, he went down. I ran out and dragged him back. He had taken a round on the right side of the neck and it got his jugular. He was just spewing blood. What do you do? I took an Ace wrap and jammed it in there. Then I took another Ace wrap and rolled it around his neck to hold it in place and I evacuated him out. That man lived! He came back to the company about 2 months later. I said, "You're alive!"

He said, "They told me if you hadn't done it the way you did, I'd be dead."

You must have felt pretty good about what you'd done.

You know what? You do but it's also embarrassing when somebody tells you you saved their life. You're just doing your job. People come up to me today and say, "You corpsmen are heroes." Maybe it's modesty, but I was just doing my job.

There were days I just had to treat minor shrapnel wounds. But I had more gunshot wounds in Hué City than anywhere else. Some of these Marines were incredibly brave. I'd see them run out in the middle of a firefight and grab a wounded guy and drag him back to me or drag him into cover.

On the 21st of February, I was wounded. There was a railroad bridge that crossed the Perfume River to the west. Just before it crossed the river there was a viaduct that crossed the road. On top of that viaduct was a bunker. We had gotten to that point and a Marine who was in that bunker was hit. I ran up there and found him inside the bunker. I went inside to work on him and just then an explosion hit it. All I remember at that point was feeling pressure and I could hear a distant roar. And then I don't remember anything for a while. There's a big blank. They told me later that a recoilless rifle round hit it but it could have been an RPG.

The next thing I remember was being a half a block down from the bunker sitting behind a building and holding a towel to my head. At some point I had liberated a pink beach towel and

I still have it today. Because it was wet, rainy, and cold, I had taken this beach towel and put it around my neck and underneath my flak jacket to help keep me warm. So I was holding it up against the side of my head and there was a Marine standing there talking to me. I could see his mouth moving but I couldn't hear what he was saying. Then things started to get a little clearer for me. I was told that after the bunker got hit, I walked out of the bunker, walked down the incline, walked down the street, stepped over trip wires, and walked around inside the building and sat down. And I don't remember any of it.

I'm told now that there was a pretty big fight going on but I don't remember it. The senior corpsman, Yount, had been severely wounded. Close to that was a train station and switch yard. By this time the battalion aid station was located in the apartment complex we had secured. We had some other walking wounded beside myself. I was going to walk them back to the battalion aid station. As we started walking, there were three guys in front of me. For some reason, and I don't know why, I stopped and turned around and at that moment the lead guy stepped on a land mine. I started to run out there to him and a bunch of ARVNs were up on a wall yelling at us that there were mines. By the time they got there to lead me to the mine field, he was already gone. The land mine had blown shrapnel up through his abdomen. He probably died from internal bleeding.

When I got to the battalion aid station Chief Legarie was still the head NCO of the battalion aid station. We didn't call him Chief; we called him "Gunny." He didn't like to be called Chief.

They numbed up my arm and were plucking shrapnel from my shoulder. I had a pair of non regulation Army suspenders. He came up to me and said, "Whose is this?" I told him it was mine. My canteen was resting on my right side just about kidney level. There was a hole about an inch and a half in diameter in it. And there was a big chunk of shrapnel inside my canteen. I don't know when that happened. If I hadn't had that canteen on, it would gotten me right in the kidney.

They pulled the shrapnel out of me. At this point, the senior corpsman, Yount, had been wounded in a firefight. I was an E-3 and the most senior corpsman in the company. If I was an E-3 and had only been in-country a month and a half, I had to be the last one left who had gone in originally.

By this time, Terry Sutton had been killed. Here's what happened. When you fire an artillery round for illumination, at a predetermined time, the round fires a flare out the back but that projectile stays on its original trajectory. They fired one of these illumination rounds and it came through the roof of a building and hit Terry in the back of the head. A friendly fire incident. They didn't tell me till 2 or 3 days later that he'd been killed. He was with the 2nd Platoon of Golf.

Here's what made it doubly bad. He had a twin sister and they had been separated at birth. He was raised by his grandparents. He had just made contact with her and was looking forward to seeing her when he got back home. It was a pretty tragic deal.

Now I was senior corpsman. I went to the Golf Company headquarters, reported in, and then went to a room. I couldn't hear anything in my right ear. That eardrum had been damaged. I lay on my left side and for the next 2 days I can't remember anything; it's a complete blank. I have no memory whatsoever. My guess is that I had a concussion or maybe I was just completely exhausted. I was just burned out. A few days before that I sat there with my .45 and looked at my foot and thought, "If I just put one through my foot, I'll be outa here." I didn't do it, thank God. I don't know what stopped me. It would hurt too much or I can't leave my

Marines. I think I was reaching the end of my rope at that point. Every day we lost somebody else. Then we'd get a new guy.

A few days later, a replacement named Valencia came and became the senior corpsman and I went back to Golf Company. And some other corpsmen had come by this time, Swanson and Pogue. Also a guy named London came in. This was right toward the tail end. We were trying to cross that canal again on the west side of the city. There was a sniper on the other side of the bridge. A Marine named [PFC Albert] Dandridge was so new he had gone straight from boot camp to Vietnam. He'd only been with the company for 2 days and still had on his stateside utilities and spit-shined boots. He was trying to run across the bridge and went down immediately. I ran out there on the bridge. By this time, most of my Marines who had had any time in country were gone and we were working with a lot of new replacements. They weren't watching me like some of the old timers did. I had to run out there with that sniper shooting at us, grabbed this guy, and dragged him back off the bridge. And he was dead. He had taken a round right in the heart.

After we got across that bridge, we got the sniper. It turned out to be a female who had a rifle with a scope on it. We then swept through until we found an ARVN compound. It was really spooky because right outside the compound were three or four Marine trucks that had been abandoned. We saw no one in the compound either. The ARVNs had just dropped all their weapons and left.

By this time we had two new lieutenants who had come in to take over two platoons of Golf Company--Stewart Brown and Peter Pace. Brown had mostly 3rd Platoon and Pete had 2nd Platoon. This was at the very tail end of the operation. Golf Company moved out of the city at night. We went out the south side of Hué and swept to the west and back to the north. We came across their water treatment plant. It was on this sweep that I was on one side of a hill. They called for me and I went over the top of the hill and our platoon sergeant was down the side of a slope a little ways lying on his belly. I could see him breathing out there but he wasn't moving. I yelled at him but he didn't respond.

They told me he had been shot while he was laying on the deck. He was laying in a cultivated field that had been plowed into rows. I dropped my pack and low-crawled out to him. He had a round through the head and the thumb on his right hand had been blown off. He was in what they called chain-stokes breathing-three short gasps followed by a another breath. He wasn't going to survive.

I tried to drag him back but the only way I could do it was to get on my knees and drag him. The moment I started doing that, they stopped shooting at us. Whether they recognized I was a medic or they were reloading or whether they were changing positions, I don't know. But they stopped shooting. And they had been sniping at me while I was laying there next to him. Once I dragged him behind a berm, they started shooting again. They were down in a tree line at the base of this hill so they had a straight-up shot at us.

We got him evacuated by helicopter but I doubt that he survived. That was the most severe wound we took that day. When we started to leave that location, I realized that my pack was still out there. So as I ran down to retrieve it, I could hear Vietnamese down in the bushes talking. I grabbed the pack and started running. Just like in the movies, I could actually see the dirt flying up around me. I dove into a fighting position and they didn't get me.

Then we pulled back off that hill and set up for a night time position. We caught some mortar fire but nobody was hurt.

The next day we swept down that hill into a valley where we found some homes which we cleared out. I had a Marine take a through-and-through in his face. The bullet went in one cheek and out the other side of his face. The bullet didn't get any teeth that I could see. How do you dress that? They didn't teach us how to apply that kind of dressing. But he was bleeding from both sides of his cheeks. You know the mouth bleeds pretty good. I took gauze, wadded it up, and poked it in the holes on both sides. And that seemed to stop the bleeding. I don't know what happened to him because I never saw him again.

By this time the south side of the Perfume River was pretty well secured. We were now trying to move around to secure any infiltration routes and capture any stragglers. We also captured two Vietnamese at that time. When they took their shirts off, they had callouses right where a pack would be. We knew they were NVA but they denied it and said they were students. But why would students have callouses over both shoulders where a backpack would be. Higher headquarters made us turn them loose. We were all upset about that.

How were they captured?

We were in the place where the Marine got the through-and-through in the face. There was a small draw and houses but they were spread out like in a subdivision. There was a lot of space between the houses. We found them hiding in one of those houses. Toward the end of the battle, we got quicker and quicker going through the buildings because by then we had kicked their butts pretty hard. They were burying their dead in shallow graves, which some of the Marines had to dig up for information, I guess. Rotting bodies is not a good smell. There were weapons laying around on the streets. We found rockets and RPG launchers, and machine guns just laying there. They had just dropped everything and ran at the very end.

After we caught those guys and let them go, we came across a water purification plant. We didn't take any casualties but we did get mortared there. They were shooting at us from down in a valley and we could see the smoke from the tube. But we couldn't get any support fire to fire on them. They fired about four or five rounds at us and gave up.

We had another corpsman injured about that time. He had a mortar round go off nearby and he was all peppered with shrapnel. When I got to him, he was all smiling because that was his third Purple Heart.

Was the battle pretty much over after this?

For us.

Where did you go?

After the mopping up action on the west side of the city, off in the jungle we could actually see the 101st Airborne working west of us. We could see the purple smoke and the helicopters buzzing around. For a day or two we just swept around the area to see what we could find.

We then went back into the city and went across the railroad bridge where I had been wounded. It had been blown but you could still walk across it. On the other side was a bunker which we manned for a few days. Then we left the city but never went back to Phu Bai. We went south of Phu Bai to Hai Van pass.

You had been in constant combat for 26 days by this time.

Yes.

So you weren't at all involved on the Citadel side of the river?

That was mostly a 1/5 or 3/5 fight. I forgot to tell you about the flagpole. There was a huge flagpole with a Viet Cong flag flying on it. We tried to shoot it down. At one point, they were firing 106s at it to blow it down. The Citadel wall itself was huge. I saw a Skyraider--a prop-driven bomber--drop a 250-pound bomb on the outside wall of this thing and it didn't even knock a hole in the wall. It just blew off a bunch of bricks.

Did you ever see the flag come down?

No. When we left it was still up there.

How did the fight end for you? How did you know it was over?

They loaded us up on trucks and took us out. They took us directly south to a small fire base off Highway 1. Then we ran some patrols out of there. This place was very sandy. We called it the "Bowling Alley."

Now I remember. We had actually went further south past Phu Bai. 2/5 had a railroad tunnel through a hill south of Phu Bai. The battalion headquarters was there. Everything was inside that tunnel--the battalion aid station, the clerk typist--everything was inside. There was a hill of shell rock and everything was exposed. There was no shade and everything was exposed and hot and miserable.

One day they called me down to the battalion headquarters. So I went down there to the H & S company and the clerk typist handed me my Purple Heart and the orders that went with it. It said, that I should mail the medal home. That's how I got my Purple Heart.

What shape were you in at this point?

I think I was pretty well numbed out. At that point, I was one of the most senior people in the whole platoon. I was an HN but I had been promoted to a 3rd class somewhere in that period. That was something Lou Legarie did for me. He got me a meritorious promotion so I didn't have to take the exam. So I had been promoted.

How much more time did you have in Vietnam after that?

I didn't leave until December and this was still mid-March.

Did you ever run into anything like Hué again?

Not exactly. But I saw a lot of interesting things. Once when we were on an operation up in the jungle, a Marine came to me and said he couldn't urinate. I was suspicious so I sent him away and a few hours later his abdomen was like a drum. I figured there was something really wrong with this guy. By this time it was dark and they wouldn't send a helicopter out to evacuate him because it wasn't an emergency medevac. By the way, I found that fairly often. After dark, it was really tough to get a helicopter to come out and pick up patients.

What did you do for him that night when he was in this terrible pain?

I kept him near me. At one point, I gave him a shot of morphine because he was in such pain. You could just thump on his bladder like a drum. I couldn't believe it. I wouldn't let him drink anything. I was afraid his bladder would burst.

About an hour after daylight, a helicopter finally came and picked him up. A week or so later he came back and I found out what happened. In the jungle, we had these little leaf leeches. One had actually crawled into his urethra and blocked it.

I also had some other things happen. We went to a place called Hai Van Pass. That's the first pass in the mountains just north of Danang. We ran some operations out of there. I was with a patrol and we walked into an ambush of Claymore mines. They went off like a daisy chain--boom, boom, boom, boom. Five or six of the Marines were down and there were a couple who were dead right off. It just tore them up. There was never any small arms fire so I think it was command-detonated by a single NVA, who then got out of there.

I had some very nasty wounds--legs, abdomens, chest. Some were done in by the ball bearings that hit them in the head. The radio was destroyed so we couldn't all for help. One of the Marines saw an Army helicopter flying over so we popped a smoke and he actually came down and evacuated our wounded. There was no radio contact; he just saw the smoke and that got his attention.

I found that 90 percent of the time, pressure dressings took care of bleeding. I only used a tourniquet a total of five or six times on amputations. One of those times was when I treated the black Marine who stepped on the booby-trapped artillery round back at An Hoa, just after Auburn.

How did you get your orders to leave Vietnam?

I did an in-country R&R at China Beach. Then later I had one in Japan. Then I had a second R&R to Japan in November. In September I was at the battalion aid station at An Hoa. We had a chief named McLaughlin. By 10 o'clock in the morning he couldn't walk a straight line. He and I did not like each other. He came back into our sleeping quarters one day and said that Echo had lost a corpsman and I was going out there until they got a replacement. I told him I would go out but that when I came back I was going to kill him.

So I went out to Echo Company and spent a week or 10 days there until a replacement arrived and then came back in. When I did, they met me on the runway with a suitcase, orders, and money to go to Japan for R&R.

I went to Danang and met up with Denny Howe there. By this time Denny had been transferred to the 1st Hospital Company in Danang. I hung out with him for a couple of days. Then I went to Japan for R&R and came back. There was a corpsman named Pogue, who had been with Golf. He came after me and he, too, had been transferred to the 1st Hospital Company.

After hanging with those guys for a few more days, I sent a message that I was ready to come back. I flew back to An Hoa and when I got there the chief was gone. They had sent him off to R&R or something. By then, I had calmed down.

Two weeks after I got back, I got my orders. I had requested to go to Laboratory Assistant School at Great Lakes and that's what my orders were. I left Vietnam the middle of December 1968.

I went to Danang and met up with Denny. He had the same flight that I did. We flew out at night. It was a big jet, a Boeing 707, I think. It was just loaded with Marines and some Navy personnel. Denny and I sat next to each other and I had the window seat. The thing that struck me the most was that you could hear a pin drop on that airplane. Not a word, nothing. Everyone was just sitting there like they were sitting in a church. There was a mixture of emotion. "God, I made it out alive. What about the guys we left?" There were a whole lot of things going through

everybody's head and nobody was talking. I thought everyone was going to shout and cheer when we got airborne, but it didn't happen. It was just dead silence.

I sat there looking out the left-hand window in the night. For some reason, I had the sensation that we were circling. I couldn't figure it out. There was a light out there that didn't seem to move. It probably took me 10 or 15 minutes before it dawned on me that I was looking at the light on the end of the wing. About 20 minutes into the flight, I started to hear people quietly talking but it never got noisy in the cabin.

What was the homecoming like?

We flew first to Okinawa and I spent 2 days there before flying on to I think was Wake Island. The runway extended out into the ocean.

From there we went to Travis. When we landed there I hadn't been paid for quite a while and I didn't have enough money to buy a plane ticket home. Someone at the air terminal pointed me across the road to an Air Force finance office. Of course, I had all my military records with me. I gave them my records and they paid me enough money to buy a ticket home.

I took a bus that got me to the airport. Because I was going back to active duty with the Navy, I couldn't wear a Marine uniform home. I had to wear my Navy uniform, which had been stored at Okinawa. I was really upset about that because I thought people would see me and think I had just come off some ship and not see me for what I actually did.

I got to the airport, bought the ticket, and the plane was ready to take off. And they actually held the plane for me. I was rushing through the airport and people were yelling stuff at me while I was running.

You mean hostile comments?

Yes. I could hear them but I wasn't going to spend much time doing anything about it. I didn't have time to argue with them when folks were holding an airplane for me to go home. Oh, yes. I don't remember the exact words, but they were hostile comments.

I flew from San Francisco to Phoenix to Denver. When I got there, I was told there had been a blizzard in Lincoln, NE, and the airport was closed. I didn't want to spend the night in the airport in Denver so I took a train to Lincoln. It seemed like that train stopped at every little town along the way. It took all night. I didn't have a heavy coat. All I had on were my blues and I was cold. Of course, I had been used to that tropical heat. And the only heat in that train was a radiator under the window. So one side would get hot and the other side would be cold. Then I'd sit on the other side. When I got to Lincoln, I called my parents and was sitting on a radiator when they got there.

When you got home, did you find that you had trouble adjusting to normal life?

Yes. When we got home, the family had some signs. My dad, who was a carpenter, had one that said, "Bac si, Welcome Home." That's Vietnamese for doctor. There were also pictures inside.

I stayed at the house for a couple of days after that. I met a friend I went to high school with. He was on leave from the Navy. I joined the VFW but it was pretty clear from the guys there that they didn't like us being there. My father, who was a World War II veteran, made a comment, "You're home now. You can forget about it."

Well, I couldn't. I may have been home about a week when I had my first nightmare. I was in my bedroom and woke up in a cold sweat yelling, "Gook! Gook! Gook!" I still

remember the dream. They were coming up the steps of our house. I could see their pith helmets and their AK-47s coming up the steps.

So, life wasn't normal after that.

No. And I was drinking hard. I was getting drunk every night. And that went on for quite a while. I had been putting most of my money while I was in Vietnam in a savings account so I had several thousand dollars. I bought a car, a 1969 Dodge Dart 340 Swinger with a four-barrel Holley.

I think I stayed home maybe 3 weeks and just couldn't take it anymore. Everything was foreign to me. The cold temperature, the people I grew up around, buddies I once had--I had nothing in common with them. I was different. Talking to my parents wasn't an easy thing. There wasn't anybody for me to associate with. So I reported a week to 10 days early at the Naval Hospital at Great Lakes for lab school.

How did that go?

It was kind of a strange situation. There was a corpsman there who had been at the BAS in An Hoa who left just after I rotated in. He told me I was out of uniform.. I had been promoted to E-5 a month early. The class I was assigned to hadn't started yet so they had me report in the morning and then I was on my own for the next week or so. At noon when the opened up the on-base bar called the Rathskeller, I went there and drank until late that night or I'd drink there and then go into town to a bar and drink there until they'd close. Then I'd sleep it off and get up the next morning, report in, and start the whole process all over again.

Did you graduate from the school?

I did. I was the only petty officer in the school. I was a second class at this point. The way I got my second class . . . I was still out in the field. A guy who was in the battalion aid station, who was a school teacher from Odessa, TX, took my second class exam for me. So I had been promoted and didn't know it. When I got to Great Lakes, a guy told me that I was out of uniform, that I was an E-5 and not an E-4.

Did you stay in the Navy and make a career of it?

No. I went to the Naval Hospital at Pensacola, FL. I worked in the lab there. The guy who helped do the autopsies was being transferred to the Naval Hospital at Guam. So they needed someone to replace him. I was a wild guy. I went out and got drunk every night. I didn't take orders from people. I refused to wear my hat outside. I wouldn't salute. I guess I just had this horrible attitude. And I'd tell people, "What are you gonna do, send me back to Vietnam?"

They asked me if I'd replace this guy. Pensacola had the basic flight training for the aviators. And they had a fair number of crashes. First, I was only going to do autopsies and help with the aircraft accidents. One of the reasons was that I had already seen mutilated bodies in Vietnam and that shouldn't be a problem for me. I was the only corpsman in the lab who had been to Vietnam. All the other people had gone directly from corps school to advanced schools, and then to the lab tour.

My routine worked out pretty well. I'd go out and party at night and stay until the bars closed. And sometimes I'd go to an after-hours club and drink there. Then in the morning I'd come in and, if I didn't have an autopsy to do, I'd go down to the morgue, lay on the autopsy table and sleep it off.

Didn't this behavior eventually get you in some kind of trouble?

No. I think they just figured, "Leave him alone." I think that's why they put me in the morgue. Out of sight, out of mind. I still worked some in the lab, when I had my regular rotation duty.

Doing autopsies didn't bother me that much except doing them on kids. I hated doing them on children.

You were assisting a physician do these autopsies? You weren't doing them yourself.

Yes. I was assisting. I'd make observations, ready the body, record organ weights, put everything back in the body after the doctor finished. I'd also remove the skull so the doctor could remove the brain.

The problems you were having manifested themselves with alcohol. Were you having other things going on, too?

Other than my lack of military bearing? I anesthetized myself at night with enough alcohol that I didn't dream; I just passed out. There was a sober point in there where I realized that something wasn't right so I tried to quit drinking. But the nightmares came back so I started drinking again. I did that for a lot of years, a lot of years.

When did you get out of the Navy?

I got out at Pensacola in 1970. I was going to the junior college down there. I dated a young lady there for a while and we'd broken up. Then in 1971 on a blind date, I met the woman whom I married. We're still married. We dated about 3 months. I decided that I wasn't doing well in school. I couldn't concentrate on the books and sitting with these young kids. I just couldn't concentrate.

I knew I wasn't going to stay in school. I couldn't find a job so I decided to come back to Lincoln. I told her I was going back to Nebraska and she could either marry me and come with me or that would be the end of it. So we got married. And we've been married 34 years in July. I guess it was the right match.

What did you do once you got back to Lincoln?

I got a job with a physician's laboratory working in one of the hospitals here in Lincoln. I also was assisting with autopsies. I did that for a couple of years. I had a routine. I did autopsies during the day and worked in the laboratory from 3 till 11 at night. By this time I had a daughter and I wasn't getting to see her very much. So I left that and I went to work at the laboratory at the waste water treatment plant analyzing sewer water for heavy metals and other things. I worked there for about 5 years. Then I went to work for the University of Nebraska as a specialist in treating boiler feed water and waste water and cooling water for the utility plant. I worked there for 24 years. My PTSD finally got too much for me and I've been on disability since 2003.

Did you get any kind of treatment for it?

Yes. I had this long history of abusing alcohol. It was really self-medication. I drank heavy almost every night. In 1972 I also joined the Nebraska National Guard. I joined an air

ambulance company here in Lincoln. At that time they had a "Try One" program. For people who had been on active duty, you could join the National Guard for a year to see if you liked it. If you didn't, you just got out, no questions.

I stayed in that until 1993 as a part-time soldier. My last 3 years in the Guard, I was a first sergeant for a forward support battalion medical company in Omaha. I actually retired from the Guard. When I turn 60 I'll start drawing retirement pay. When I take the time I had in the Guard and tie it with my active duty I have over 20 years.

Staying around the military, at least I had some contact with military help. I knew all along that I had Vietnam problems but I had this attitude that when the shit hit the fan and things got tough and then you were miserable--hot, cold, muddy, thirsty--and just hated where you were in Vietnam, you didn't just throw up your hands and say, "I quit." You just sucked it up and marched on.

So I had that attitude. I didn't give up in combat; I'm not gonna give up now. So I'd drink every night until I passed out. I did that for a lot of years until about 1997. Then I realized it was killing me. I also found myself sitting on my bed with a shotgun one day and knew that this was not gonna work. That's when I went to the VA.

Have they been helpful?

They have. I have no complaints. They put me on an antidepressant right away. I quit drinking. The antidepressant helped me sleep at night so I didn't need the alcohol any more. I went on a monthly basis to visit with a social worker there. There have been some rough spots. The psychiatrist who saw me originally transferred to another VA Hospital out in Arizona. Then they eliminated some staff at the hospital. They eliminated my social worker so I went for a period of time without a psychiatrist. I eventually got a new psychiatrist and a new case worker. I go on a monthly basis to see the case worker. And I see the psychiatrist every 3 or 4 months. I don't do group therapy.

Years ago some Vietnam vets here in Lincoln got together and formed our own group. I found that being the doc, I didn't work on me; I worked on everybody else. I can take over a room so I don't do that. If I'm in a group, I don't work on my issues. I tend to be the doc and listen to other people. So, Beverly, my social worker at the VA Hospital, understands that and I just work with her.

It's been about 35 years since you were in Vietnam. This is almost a stupid question for me to ask even though I ask it of almost all the people I talk to. In your case, the answer is obvious. Do you think about Vietnam much anymore?

I can't help it. It's a daily thought in my head. And not only that, my flashback can be a smell and what that smell came from. The smell is burned flesh, blood, the rotten tobacco the Vietnamese smoked in those villages. I can smell it right now. It's amazing. If I'm cutting some meat and I get some blood on my hands, that can trigger it. There were days on end, you could look at my hands, and I would have dried blood around the rims of my fingernails and on the back of my hands. It was dried blood from the Marines I'd worked on. And I didn't have any way to wash my hands. After a while you just didn't care any more. It just became a way of life.

So, Vietnam is part of your everyday life.

Yes, it is. It influences my life every day. I have a short fuse. It could be something minor and I'll blow up. But if you leave me alone, 10 or 15 minutes later, I'll calm down. My wife has learned over the years that there are things you don't do. You don't get into an argument with me. If I scream and holler, get out of the room. Ignore me and go away. There's a sad legacy of what it's done to my children. I have three daughters and I can see that behavior in all three, particularly in my middle daughter. She's actually been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress. I'm the most dominant personality in the house and that's what they grew up around. I feel bad about it but I can't go back and change it. All I can do is understand what they're going through.

It's a daily thing with me. And there are some things I can't watch. I don't go to movies because I don't sitting in that room full of people. I'm fairly isolated. I don't go out and socialize with people. I stick around my house, for the most part. I go to a Menards. My wife says that's my second home.

What is that?

Menards is a lumber yard like Home Depot. I spend time there looking around for stuff. I also spend time working in my yard. I do crafts. I pretty much live in my basement. I sleep down there; I have my TV down there. Beverly says that's my bunker.

You feel safe there.

Yeah.

I can't tell you how much I appreciate you spending time with me. We've spent a bunch of hours together. I know it wasn't an easy story to tell but I feel privileged and honored that you felt safe enough to talk to me about it.

You know what? It's good therapy for me just to get it out. It helps to talk about it. It's not ever going to cure anything. No one is ever going to wave a magic wand over me and make it go away.

Does the current situation--the war in Iraq--does that trigger things?

Yes it does. 9-11 just crushed me. For days after that, I was so full of rage and anger. I was still working at the time. The Army has a program for people like me who have been retired out. You can go back on active duty for 2 years. I checked to see if they would take me because I wanted to get deployed to Iraq. But I had a heart attack in 1998 and I've got a stent in the right vein to my heart. And because I have that, they'd let me come back on active duty but they wouldn't deploy me. I'd man a clinic or a stateside post and I don't want to do that.

Why did you want to get deployed? Would it make you feel useful or would it help your own situation?

I think that it's because I feel comfortable with it and I think I'd be useful. Someone with my experience would be useful. I don't know. Maybe in the back of my head it's a death wish.

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